

Australia: Human Impacts on the Natural Environment

What I Learned

I learned much while completing my STEP Signature Project. I learned about ocean pollution while cleaning up half of a mile of a beach in Port Douglas with Tangaroa Blue. I learned to value my environment and to watch my consumption of all plastics, single-use or not.

I learned the importance of completing transects with Sheoak Ridge and the Great Barrier Reef Legacy. I was able to contribute to research on the vitality of the Great Barrier Reef and that was extremely rewarding. I was also able to learn that the Reef is not completely dead, but is alive and more colorful than one could ever imagine.



My Motivation

Ever since I was small, I had known I wanted to visit a foreign country and I wanted to one day study abroad. What I did not know was where and when I would do either of those things.

In July of 2018, a friend of mine told me about her study abroad trip she had taken to Australia and I immediately knew that was the country I wanted to study in. She did inform me, however, that the program was very selective and I would have to work hard to get into it.

In October of 2018, I attended an informational session for Australia: Human Impacts on the Natural Environment on a whim. After attending the information session and hearing about the debates, camping, snorkeling, and homestays, I knew this trip was going to be my goal for the year.

The following months and weeks were spent researching the program and the program director. I asked former participants all about the trip and about the application process. One thing I knew for sure was that this trip with all it had to offer would further me in many ways.

The application was due on January 15th, 2019, but the project description was due to my STEP Mentor before that deadline, so I was even more motivated to get into this program. With the help of my STEP Faculty Mentor, I was able to get into my program and write a grant for STEP funding for my study abroad trip in May of 2019.

The main objective of the final project, Australia: Human Impacts on the Natural Environment, is to reach a greater understanding about the impacts humans have on the natural world we are surrounded by. I hope to learn about the use of renewable energy to run entire farms and the impact of a carbon tax on the citizens. After arriving, I will complete five modules based off of field experiences and off of course readings on topics. Each module includes quizzes, essay questions, and debates to ensure I will be getting the most out of the trip.

Along with the modules, I will also be writing reflective letters. I must know about natural systems and ecological concepts related to North Queensland. Some of these concepts I will be learning will be able to be brought back home to Columbus, Ohio to better myself and my environment. I will learn about how colonialism has impacted the natural environment in Australia and will be able to apply that to what I have learned about the migrations to America made by Europeans. I will also learn more about how humans affect the environment with pollution, carbon emissions, chemicals, and deforestation.



What was Transformational?

My view of the world was impacted heavily through my STEP Signature Project. Because of the media, I believed the Great Barrier Reef was completely dead. I believed I would never see it and that it would be bright white from bleaching. When I arrived the first day on the reef, I was pleasantly surprised! It was vibrant and full of life from Green Sea Turtles to octopus to starfish. It was so unlike what the media had painted it to be and it restored my faith in the ocean.

My view of the world was also impacted because I learned from so many people who care about the environment just when I thought there were none. I worked with Tangaroa Blue who works to clean beaches and then document the trash and trace its origin in hopes to reduce the amount made. I also met Dr. Claire Baker, a trained entomologist, who rehabilitates wallabies and educates high school and college age students about reducing their carbon footprint. She taught about living so far off the grid that the only bathrooms are composting and housing was minimalist tents.

Before my STEP Signature Project, I did not know there were so many people educating youth on their environmental impacts and I honestly did not have much faith in the world. Today, I am glad to see the large impact of these groups and to see how their impact carries on in Australia and in the United States.

Name: Kamala Sweeney
STEP Project Category: Education Abroad
STEP Faculty Mentor: Dr. Maurice Eastridge
Major: Agricultural Communications



My Favorite Part of My Experience

My favorite part of my study abroad experience in Australia was completing the transects. A transect, as I learned, is a collection of data for a certain amount of land or sea (typically 100 meters) to be used for research processes.

I completed my first transect at Sheoak Ridge in the rainforest under the instruction of Dr. Claire Baker. I really enjoyed this part of the experience because I got to go deep into the rainforest and record the number of creatures and plant life. I got to see different trees and types of roots, such as buttress roots.

My next and final two transects were completed in the Great Barrier Reef under the instruction of a marine biologist from the Great Barrier Reef Legacy. I got to travel to two different dive sites in this World Heritage Site and explore. While in the Great Barrier Reef, I was given the opportunity to see plenty of marine life that the only place I would be able to see them in the United States would be at an aquarium. I was able to explore the site and swim 100 meters of a certain area and tally the number of fish seen.

Before visiting the Great Barrier Reef, I thought the Reef was completely dead because of what the media said. Despite what the media said, the Reef was beautiful. Completing the transects allowed me to see the reef for all that it had to offer. I had to learn the different species of fish and invertebrates that live in the Reef.